

SOCIAL INNOVATION ON THE RISE – RESULTS OF THE FIRST GLOBAL MAPPING

WHAT OVER 1.000 INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS WORLDWIDE REVEAL ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL INNOVATION TO ADDRESS THE GREAT SOCIETAL CHALLENGES.

The project SI-DRIVE “Social Innovation: Driving Force of Social Change” mapped 1.005 social innovation initiatives belonging to seven policy fields on all five continents of the world. The results of the comparative analysis give insights into the highly diverse world of social innovation, the variety of actors and their interaction, and the systemic character of the concept.

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CHALLENGING INNOVATION PATTERNS

Recent years have seen new forms of innovation emerging, both as an object of research and development: social innovations appear in a variety of forms and influence people’s lives. They change the way we live together, work or handle crises. Likewise, they are driven by different societal sectors and cross-sectoral networks and individuals. There is a growing consensus among practitioners, policy makers and the research community that technological innovations alone are not capable of overcoming the social and economic challenges modern societies are facing. We find a vast and growing number of social innovation initiatives all over the world, reflected as well by the global mapping of more than 1.000 cases in the different world regions of SI-DRIVE.

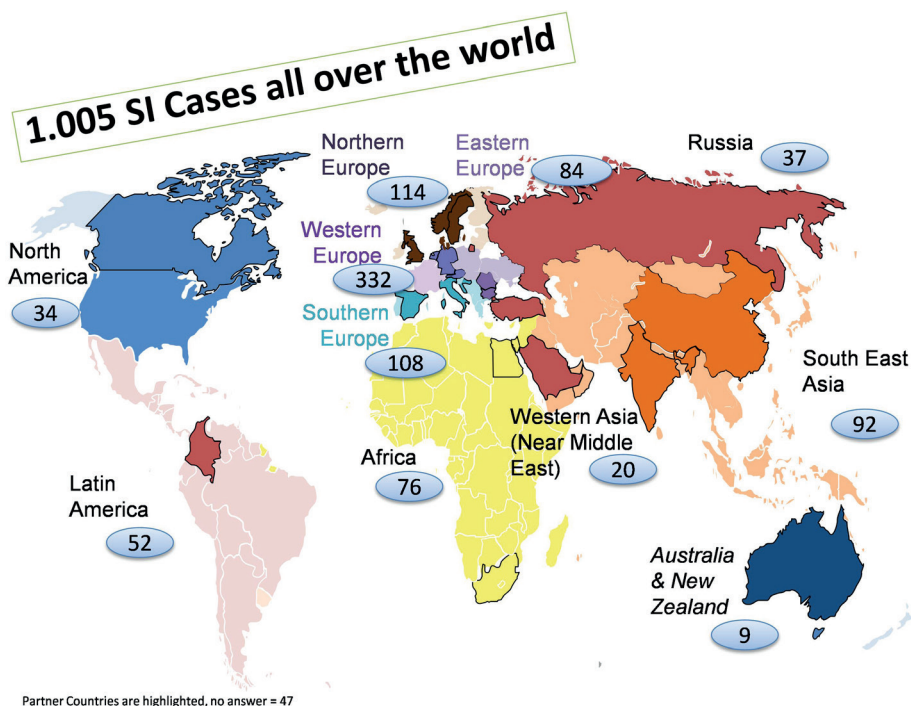
The global mapping uncovers countless approaches and successful initiatives that illustrate the strengths and potentials of social innovations in the manifold areas of social integration through education and poverty reduction, in establishing sustainable patterns of consumption, or in coping with demographic change. At the same time, social innovations are gaining importance not only in relation to

social integration and equal opportunities, but also in respect to the innovative ability and future sustainability of society as a whole.

AN ECOSYSTEM FOR SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Although social innovation is widely recognised as an important development phenomenon, it has traditionally been perceived as being limited in scope. One key reason for this is that for a long time, the social innovation discussion was predominantly anchored within civil society – and still is in many parts of the world. Yet such a limited understanding is not sufficient for developing the potentials of social innovation. Instead, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive concept of social innovation, which looks at its various manifestations, actors and cultural contexts, and frees the term from the narrow confines of a limited rather traditional economic orientation that is focused on the concept of social entrepreneurship.

A comprehensive understanding of social innovation emphasizes the different societal sectors and the surrounding ecosystem for social innovation on the scene. The ecosystem



Mapping 1.005 social innovation initiatives worldwide – SI-DRIVE partner countries are highlighted.

of social innovation “is in very different stages of development across Europe, however. In all countries, though, the ecosystem is under development and there are a number of important factors enabling the development of social innovation, including important support and impetus from the EU” [1, p. 7]. At the same time, the mapping revealed an underdeveloped status of conceptualisation and institutionalisation. There is no shared understanding of social innovation (including a clear differentiation from other concepts such as social entrepreneurship or technology innovation) and no integration in a comprehensive (social) innovation policy. Policy field related documents of public authorities such as the European Commission, the United Nations, the OECD, the World Bank, etc. often even do not refer to social innovations (exceptions are Horizon 2020 documents as well as publications of some DGs). Only in a few countries as e.g. Colombia, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the USA, politics has taken up social innovation. However, in most of the countries there are no policy institutions with direct responsibility for Social Innovation.

SOCIAL INNOVATION – A BABYLONIAN CONFUSION

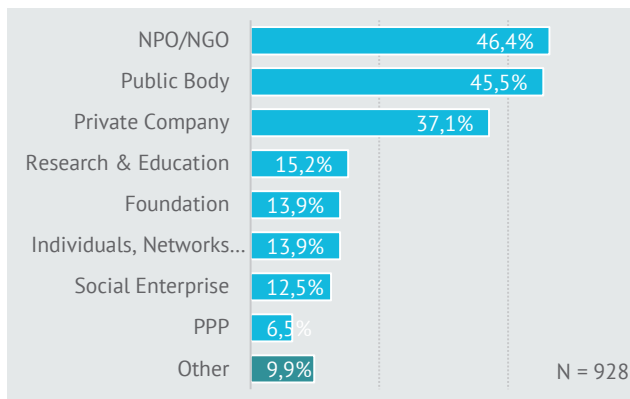
Even though a broad spectrum of social innovations is present in the policy fields, all Policy Field Reports of SI-DRIVE notify an unclear understanding of the concept of social innovation. They further report on social innovation in their policy fields, which are not labelled as such and call for further social innovations to respond to the societal challenges the world is facing.

The mapping revealed the variety and diversity of social innovation worldwide, the different social innovation initiatives and practices, concepts and approaches, innovation processes and actor constellations, the variety of processes and networking through which social innovation occurs.

SOCIAL INNOVATION – A JOINT FORCE

The mapping results reaffirm the assumption that the concept of social innovation cannot be limited to one focus, be it social entrepreneurship or social economy, and demonstrates that widening the perspective is crucial for understanding the concept in its entirety. A broad range of actors is involved in the mapped social innovation initiatives. The global mapping clearly shows the participation of partners from all sectors. The public, private, and the civil society sector are represented to a high degree in all policy fields and world regions. The majority of mapped initiatives has been developed and implemented in a social network in which more than one sector is involved. We can say that cross-sectoral collaboration of the public sector, civil society and the private sector is playing a key role, and becomes even more important on the level of practice fields (see Howaldt’s contribution on Social Change).

In this context, a constructive partnership between the sectors is a very important factor in order to reap the full potential of social innovation. Social innovations are first and foremost ensemble performances, requiring interaction between many actors. These findings indicate that cross-sectoral collaborations are of great importance, whereby as



Different sectors are involved in social innovations (multiple answers possible)

might be assumed a general dominance of the civil society cannot be detected (see graphic on sector involvement).

The great importance of empowerment of beneficiaries and citizens in the social innovation concept corresponds with the fact that almost half of the initiatives mapped by SI-DRIVE state a direct user or beneficiary involvement. However, the rates of involvement differ in the policy fields and world regions. Social innovations aim at activating, fostering, and utilising the innovation potential of the whole society. Empowering the beneficiaries, increasing their capacities to meet social needs and giving them 'agency' is an indispensable component of social innovation. Thereby, we find various forms of user involvement from the development or improvement of the solution over providing feedback, suggestions and knowledge to the adaptation of the social innovation idea for personalized solutions.

Empowerment and human resources and knowledge development show one of the core challenges of social innovation initiatives all over Europe and also in other world

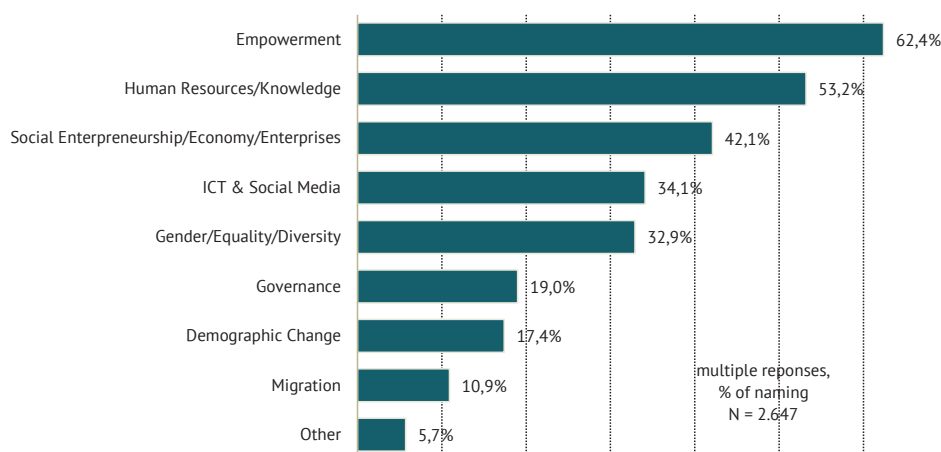
regions. A central concern of the initiatives is about the people involved, be it promoters or users, and increasing their competences and capacities to act (see bar chart cross-cutting themes addressed).

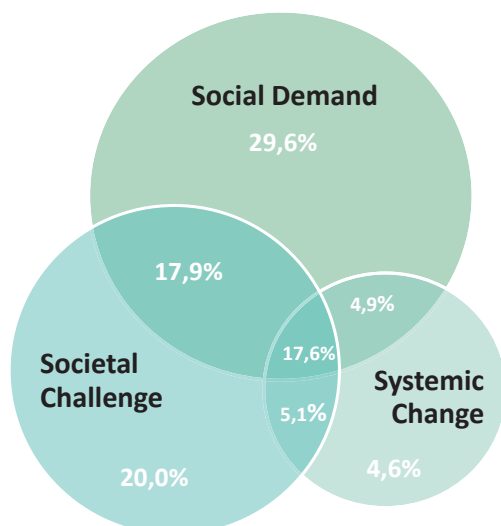
Alongside with the growing importance of social innovation and the variety of actors within the innovation process we perceive an awareness of the complexity of innovation processes, along with increasing demands as far as the management and governance of innovation are concerned. In this regard, the question arises which governance structures support the growth of social innovations that are set as combined actions.

To unfold the potential of social innovation it is important to develop a comprehensive understanding of social innovation. Considering the complexity of innovation processes we need to focus on the cross-sector dynamics of social innovation and the diversity of actors and their roles and functions within the innovation process (including their interaction in networks etc.) on the one hand and the framework conditions including governance models, addressed societal needs and challenges, resources, capabilities and constraints, on the other hand.

The mapping also reveals the capacities of social innovations to modify or even re-direct social change and to empower people – i.e. to address a wide variety of stakeholder groups, as well as the broader public, in order to improve social cohesion and to allow for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The mapping activities shed light on the great many, often nameless but still important, social innovations responding to specific and every-day social demands or incremental innovations. The distinction between three different output levels is taken up by the SI-DRIVE project, but also has to be modified to some extent. There is a strong relationship between social demands, unmet social

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES ADDRESSED BY THE INITIATIVE





Addressed societal level (N=953)

needs societal challenges and transformative social change in different policy fields and approaches (see graphic on addressed societal level). However, the very idea of systemic change implies the involvement of multiple institutions, norms and practices, as well as the introduction of multiple kinds of complementary innovations to cope with the high complexity of problems, which require structural changes in society. Only then will we be able to realize the excessive expectations of ground-breaking systemic social innovations (or radical innovations in the common language of innovation theory and research), and transformative change.

CONCLUSION: ESTABLISHING FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

The mapping activities of the SI-Drive project depict countless approaches and successful initiatives that illustrate the strengths and potentials of social innovations in the area of social integration through education and poverty reduction,

in establishing sustainable patterns of consumption, or in coping with demographic change. Social innovations are gaining in importance not only in relation to social integration and equal opportunities, but also in respect to the innovative ability and future sustainability of society as a whole.

At the same time, the mapping underlines the importance of establishing framework conditions for social innovations to diffuse and realise their full potential. Supporting infrastructures similar to those that have been developed for the area of technology funding within the last decades as well as an innovation policy directed at the social innovation are missing. In a few countries, politics has taken up social innovation. But in most of the countries there are no policy institutions with direct responsibility for Social Innovation. Another shortcoming is the occasional direct involvement of universities and other research facilities in initiatives. Making the topic a part of their strategies is an important future challenge.

The good news is that there is an increasing awareness and promotion of social innovation: In many countries, the promotion of social innovation itself by the EU has served as a driver and opportunity for various actors to embrace new ways of working, access to new funding streams, and promotion of change at a national level. Even though a lot has been done during the last years, there are still some important steps to take in order to move social innovation from the margin to the mainstream of the political agenda.

The key results of the mapping are available as a download: <https://www.si-drive.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SI-DRIVE-CA-short-2016-11-30-Druckversion.pdf>

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- [2] Howaldt, Jürgen/ Schröder, Antonius/ Kaletka, Christoph/ Rehfeld, Dieter/ Terstriep, Judith (2016): Mapping the world of social innovation. A global comparative analysis across sectors and world regions, TU Dortmund University: Dortmund. Internet: <https://www.si-drive.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SI-DRIVE-D1-4-Comparative-Analysis-2016-08-15-final.pdf> [last accessed 18.11.2016].
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